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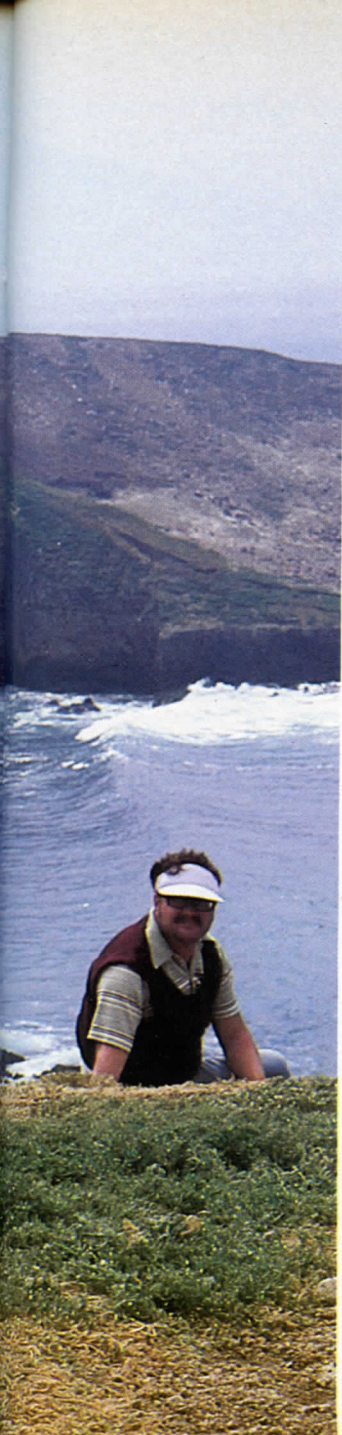




Sounds of the surf lapping at the volcanic rock cliffs lull relaxed day hikers on tiny Santa Barbara Island's terraced bluffs

So remote, so empty, so close . . . "America's Galapagos"

The Channel Islands . . . our newest national park



BILL ROSS



Coming ashore means a short ride by skiff from tour boat

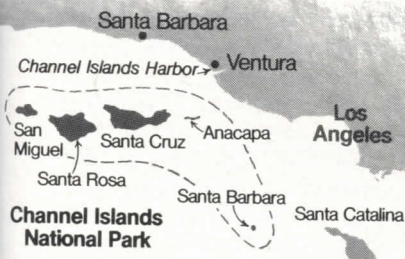


NAYLAND WILKINS

Proud, portly Stellar sea lion keeps watch over his harem on San Miguel Island, their southernmost Pacific stop



Craggy, twisted spine of Anacapa stretches away toward its twin-peaked west end



Even in winter's clear sunshine, ocean mist softens the contours of the Channel Islands, making it hard to identify those gentle, luminous shapes on the horizon or judge their true distance from shore. Lying 11 to 40 miles off the coast, they loom tantalizingly close one moment, then ebb into fog the next.

Reachable only by boat, the islands offer perhaps the ultimate close-to-home getaway for Southern Californians and a revelation for others. You'll find no high-rise hotels, no posh resorts—in fact virtually no modern comforts at all. Instead, the delights and discoveries are of a different sort: wave-washed coves as empty

as the one Juan Cabrillo sailed into in 1542, raucous congregations of sea lions and cormorants, yellowtail that strip your reel without looking back, trails to dramatic vantage points, fossils hinting of an ancient "superisland," and some of North America's oldest traces of man.

In 1980, five of the islands—San Miguel,



Pelican and gull swoop over new park headquarters on peninsula in Ventura harbor. This summer, shuttle buses may run to it from nearby McGrath State Beach

BILL ROSS



Long, steep stair at Landing Cove leads up to nature trails, ranger station

Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, Anacapa, and Santa Barbara—were rounded up as the nation's 40th and the West's newest national park. More recently, the surrounding waters were designated a national marine sanctuary, one of only three in the U.S.

Both actions acknowledge the need to protect islands that are frequently described as America's Galapagos, where numerous plants and several animal species have evolved to a unique state.

Hand in hand with more protection, public access is increasing under careful control. Regular boat trips and group expeditions are on the rise. Trips are run mostly spring through fall, with frequency increasing in late spring and summer when seas are calmest. Now into early spring, you get wildflowers and greenery—and the clearest air of the year. This month also marks the opening of the new mainland visitor center pictured above.

Where did these islands come from?

The islands were first thrust out of the sea at the peak of Southern California's volcanic activity some 14 million years ago, then settled again beneath the water. Eons of faulting and shifting followed. As the seas flowed over continental land masses, freezing into glaciers during the ice ages, first Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa emerged, followed by Santa Barbara. San Miguel and Anacapa didn't reveal themselves in the early going, but eventually all five emerged and sank many times as glaciation alternated with massive melting.

Most geologists believe that some 20,000 years ago the four northern islands were



Primitive camping areas on Santa Barbara Island are just that: you bring water and all supplies with you. Cove below campsite is popular anchorage for pleasure boaters

linked, only to separate during the final glacial melt into the wind-and-wave-whipped formations we see today. What about the long-held theory that the Channel Islands were once a seaward extension of the Santa Monica Mountains, linked up at Point Mugu? Recent studies have cast it into doubt.

The belief was based largely on the assumption that a land bridge was the only way terrestrial animals could have arrived, but there are other explanations. The dwarf mammoth found in fossil form on San Miguel and Santa Rosa—a shaggy 6-foot cousin to the mainland

behemoth—was likely the islands' first snorkeler: elephants have always been excellent swimmers, with trunk as snorkel and inner-skull air pockets for flotation. And the few small terrestrial animals found here could have been washed to sea clinging to logs and other debris, and accidentally reached the islands. The introduction of plants—borne by winds, currents, or birds—is easily explained.

Movie and maps at new visitor center

At Channel Islands Harbor in Ventura, the new park headquarters and visitor center tell the story. Exhibits will be

completed through the spring; meanwhile, they're supplemented by photographic displays. A new film shown in the 75-seat theater throughout the day gives a park overview.

Freestanding pedestal-mounted relief maps of each island will have photographs and text on important features.

A diorama of sorts will introduce the islands' plant and animal life. You'll learn about some unique species, such as the trusting little island foxes (three park islands have their own subspecies); the island skunk of Santa Rosa and Santa Cruz; eight species of bats; the deer mouse grown larger due to lack of predators; the Santa Cruz Island scrub jay, which resembles a large bluejay.

In the plant community, the yellow-flowered giant coreopsis is the star. Growing only on the islands and along the nearby coast, it blooms in spring atop thick,

stunted-looking knee- to hip-high stems that give the appearance of a gnome forest. Other insular plants of distinction are some ironwood varieties, succulent dudleyas, the Santa Cruz Island pine, and the Torrey pine found only on Santa Rosa and just north of San Diego.

The tidepool section (complete with tides) highlights anemones, urchins, starfish, limpets, and mussels, which defy currents and waves to maintain their toehold at the islands' perimeters.

Before you make an island foray, the visitor center will also teach you how to recognize the six species of pinnipeds found within the park: the California sea lion, Stellar sea lion, northern elephant seal, harbor seal, northern fur seal, and Guadalupe fur seal. All but the last breed on San Miguel, making it the world's most diversified rookery.

As pups are born (mostly May through

July) and the battle for harems begins again, you'll hear the barks and bellows of thousands of California sea lions. A few hundred northern fur seals have recolonized on San Miguel in the past few decades (after breeding for a long while only in the Bering Sea). The Guadalupe fur seal, hunted almost to extinction in the 1800s, is still seen more rarely than the others. The northern elephant seal is making a better comeback, breeding in winter on sandy coves of San Miguel, Santa Rosa, and just now spreading to Santa Rosa. Sleek harbor seals breed on all the islands and pup in early spring.

Other exhibits explain the sea birds that have major rookeries here—the main nesting area south of the Farallon Islands and one of the major breeding areas in the eastern North Pacific. Again San Miguel is the real center of the action: right below Point Conception, the current and

Expeditions out to the Channel Islands . . . 10 groups lead trips

The easiest way to visit one of the Channel Islands is by joining an organized expedition. These 10 organizations will run trips in 1982. Reservations are assured only on receipt of funds.

Be sure to wear rubber-soled shoes for the boat trip, and dress in layers: a cool, foggy morning can turn bright and hot by midday, then chilling before you reach home port.

American Cetacean Society, Los Angeles Chapter, Box 2698, San Pedro 90731; (213) 548-6279. Trips take up to 50 people. Reserve one month ahead; if there are cancellations, you may find room up to a week before. For information or reservations, contact Bemí DeBus, 901 25th St., Santa Monica 90403; (213) 828-2397. Bring lunch.

To Anacapa. March 27; \$25.

To Santa Barbara. April 23; \$47.50.

Cabrillo Marine Museum, 3720 Stephen M. White Dr., San Pedro 90731; (213) 831-0062.

To Anacapa. Day trips on April 10 and May 8; \$40. Bring lunch; limited to 41 people. Reserve now.

To Santa Barbara. Day trips on February 13 and March 6; \$45; limited to 66 people. Reserve now. Two fall cruises; dates and cost available in July.

To Santa Cruz. Possible fall cruise with The Nature Conservancy; date and cost available in July.

To Santa Cruz, Anacapa, Santa Barbara, San Miguel, Catalina. Five-day cruise, May 3 through 7; \$560 or \$580, includes everything (\$200 due with reservation, balance by March 3); limited to 35 people.

City of San Buenaventura Department of Parks and Recreation, Box 99, Ventura

93002; (805) 644-7421. Reserve at least a month ahead. Call this month about fall trips.

To Anacapa. Overnight camp-out March 13 and 14; \$47 for city residents, \$56.50 for others; limited to 15 people. Day trip March 13; \$28 residents, \$33.50 others; limited to 29 people. Bring food, camping gear.

Trip to Anacapa's middle isle planned for summer or fall.

To Santa Cruz. Day trip June 6; call now for cost; limited to 40 people.

Island Packers Co., Box 993, Ventura 93002; (805) 642-1393.

To Anacapa. Through March, daily trips on demand (minimum 20 persons). April through mid-June, daily trips Friday through Monday on demand (minimum 20 persons). June 15 through Labor Day, trips daily except Wednesday. Cost: \$22 per adult, \$11 for children 12 and under. Bring lunch. Reserve at least two weeks in advance.

To Santa Cruz. At least one trip a month from April through October, with The Nature Conservancy; \$30. Must be 10 years or older. Dates available in March. Will also arrange charter to any Channel Island for individuals or groups.

Los Angeles Audubon Society, Audubon House, Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles 90046; (213) 876-0202.

Four 1982 trips will circle best bird-watching locations, but not land. Dates and prices are tentative. Reserve three months ahead. Must be 12 years or older.

To Santa Barbara. May 2 and November 21; limited to 44 people. Bring food and water.

To San Miguel. Two overnight trips: May 22 and 23, and August 28 and 29; \$40; limited to 48 people.

Los Angeles Oceanic Society, (213) 987-3293 or 340-0094. If demand warrants, society will schedule 1982 trips to Anacapa and Santa Cruz. Call to learn dates, costs.

Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, 900 Exposition Blvd., Los Angeles 90007; (213) 749-3583.

To Santa Barbara. Four-day trip July 2 through 5 for \$380; five-day trip July 5 through 9 for \$425. Each trip limited to 20 people; prices include all meals. Reserve two months in advance.

Pacific Adventures, Box 5041, Riverside, Calif. 92517; (714) 684-1227.

To Santa Cruz. Three-day weekend trips on 45-foot trimaran, June 18 through the end of July; \$175 includes all meals. Limited to 10 people. Reserve three months in advance.

Santa Barbara Island Cruises, c/o Sea Landing Sportfishing, Breakwater, Santa Barbara 93109; (805) 963-3522.

To Santa Cruz. Coastal cruises circle island every Saturday and Sunday from 9 to 3; \$19.50 for adults, \$12.50 for 12 and under. Limited to 44 people. Reserve two days ahead.

Landing excursions, with The Nature Conservancy, leave once a month June through October; \$30. Reserve at least one month ahead. Call for dates. Limited to 35. Will arrange charter to any Channel Island for individuals or groups.

Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, 2559 Puesta del Sol Rd., Santa Barbara 93105; (805) 682-4711.

To San Miguel. Weekend trip February 20 and 21 (slight chance of space available due to cancellation); \$180 including meals. Bring camping gear to sleep on boat. Four naturalists accompany.

To Santa Cruz. Dates for summer trips available in April.

strong winds bring deep waters—rich in the birds' undersea food supply—to the surface. San Miguel is the chosen nesting spot for three species of cormorants, two of storm petrels, more than 10,000 pairs of Southern California Cassin's auklets, and the pigeon guillemot.

Santa Barbara has perhaps the world's largest population of Xantus' murrelet and the only nesting place in America of the black storm petrel. The Western gull favors Santa Barbara as well as Anacapa, whose west end is the only regular breeding place for the California brown pelican in the western U.S.

Visitor center hours are 8:30 to 5 daily except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. It's easily reached from the Ventura Freeway (U.S. 101): north-bound exit at Victoria Avenue; south-bound at Seaward Avenue. Either way, follow signs to the center. The address is 1901 Spinnaker Dr., Ventura 93001.

San Miguel: ghostly trees, and the ghost of Cabrillo?

Though part of the park, the island is still owned by the Navy, which once used it as a bombing range and missile-tracking station. A trail runs most of the 8-mile length from Cuyler Harbor to Point Bennett, where the pinniped population puts on one of the world's outstanding wildlife displays.

You'll cross the flanks of two rounded hills—Green Mountain and San Miguel Peak—and climb deeply eroded ravines to see the caliche forest, an amazingly lunar landscape. Calcified sheaths of plants that died thousands of years ago were made of calcium carbonate reacting with ancient plants' organic acids. More than 500 Chumash village sites and middens have also been found, suggesting a crowded welcome for Juan Cabrillo, who is thought to be buried here.

Individuals can make a daytime visit by acquiring a free permit in advance from park headquarters; write to the address given above. A ranger is always stationed on the island.

Santa Rosa: a working cattle ranch

The second largest island, Santa Rosa boasts 400-foot-high sand dunes at its western end, long spits of bright white sand, and sea caves you can explore by skiff. Findings at some sites suggest possibly the earliest presence of man in North America. In spring a great variety of wildflowers, many of them unique,

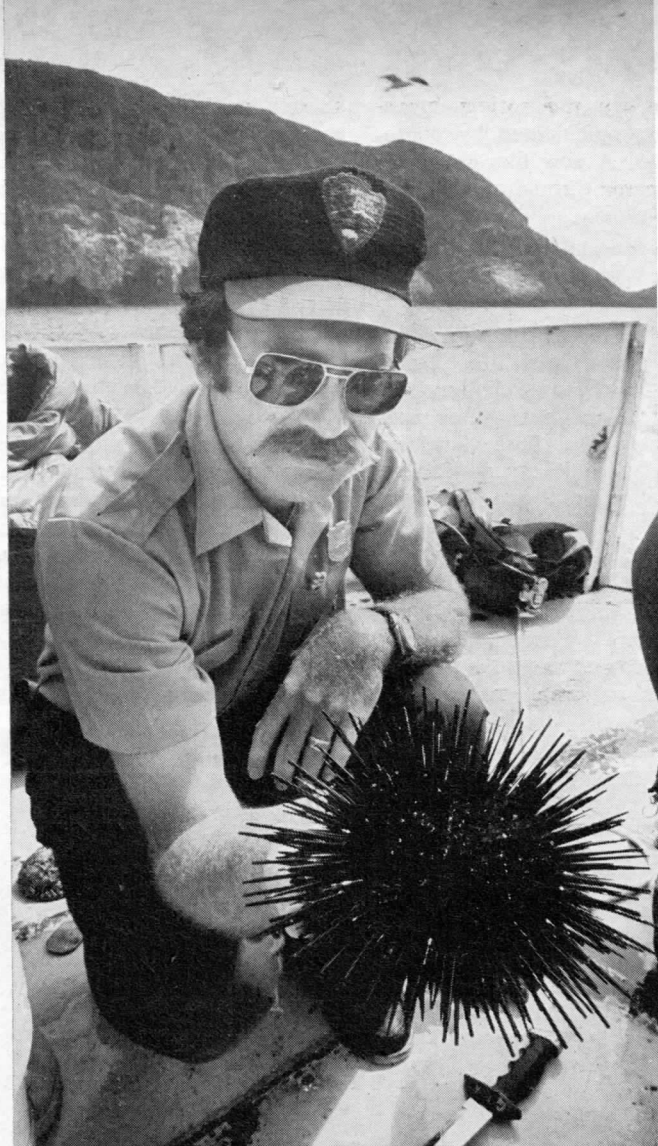
relieve grassy acreage.

Still privately owned by Vail & Vickers cattle ranch, the island is open for daytime visits by free permit. Write to the owners at 123 W. Padre St., Santa Barbara 93105; (805) 682-7645. The bill establishing the park directs the federal government to buy the island later.

Santa Cruz: most like the mainland

With the most varied topography, Santa Cruz is densely wooded, peaked (to over 2,400 feet), and valleyed. Of its many sea caves, 70-foot-high Painted Cave is the most spectacular. Well-protected coves, particularly on the north shore, are good for swimming, snorkeling, and small-boat anchorage.

Named by Gaspar de Portolá in the



Spiny purple sea urchin rests lightly on ranger's hand. Brought up by divers off Anacapa, the creature was quickly returned



Volunteers from Cabrillo Marine Museum annually reenact explorer's San Miguel arrival. He later died here of gangrene

Tidepooling, bird watching... nature-exploring the islands

1760s, the island had lost its Chumash population to mainland mission slavery by 1814. In the 1880s, a colony of French and Italian immigrants began a sheep and cattle ranching operation, raised almonds and olives, produced honey, and made wine.

In 1937, ownership of the western nine-



Tidepool walking on shore of Santa Barbara Island shows visitors a fascinating world: scuttling rock crabs, sculpin darting about, clinging limpets, the ballets of drifting sea anemones. If you pick anything up, be sure to put it back

BILL ROSS



Cameras, binoculars, telescopes at the ready, serious bird-watchers seek Channel Islands' rich rewards

Santa Cruz Island Company, 515 S. Flower St., Los Angeles 90071; (213) 485-9208.

Anacapa: the closest day trip

The only island to keep a semblance of its Chumash name, it is actually a chain of three islets. Arch Rock, a 40-foot-high natural sea bridge at the east end, is the symbol of the national park.

The public can visit the eastern islet without a permit. You'll climb a ladder to a landing, from which 152 steps lead to the sparsely vegetated bluffs where a resident ranger conducts walks on a nature trail. There is also a small museum. Uphill, what appears to be a church is actually a water tank, disguised after too many water-borne sharpshooters took pot shots at it. If you want to camp, you'll need a free permit in advance from park headquarters.

Because of its importance as the brown pelican breeding site, the western isle is off limits. The middle isle offers virtually no place to land except at low tide, though there are coves for boat anchorage and good diving. Off its northeast

end lies a major attraction for divers: the 225-foot side-wheeler *Winfield Scott*, which sank in deep fog in 1853 and is now visible in about 20 feet of water.

Santa Barbara: the best trail system

In 1602, the Spanish explorer Sebastián Vizcaíno named this 1- by 1½-mile twin-peaked island after the patron saint of navigators. With Anacapa, it was opened to the public in 1938 as Channel Islands National Monument. Regular visitor use has created a network of trails.

Canyon View Nature Trail is a ¼-mile loop with a self-guiding brochure. Saddle Trail crosses the island's midsection, connecting with three other trails: Signal Peak Loop, which leads past giant coreopsis thickets to good views of a rocky shore where California sea lions haul out; Elephant Seal Cove Trail, with rare views of these easily spooked creatures; and Arch Point Loop, which goes out to the battery-operated lighthouse.

As on east Anacapa, you can visit without a permit. There is a resident ranger on hand. To camp, obtain a free permit from park headquarters. □

tenths passed to the Stanton family, who are now in an extended process of turning it over to The Nature Conservancy, a national conservation organization. The remainder is still the Gherini family sheep ranch, which will be purchased in time by the federal government. For free daytime landing permits, apply to the